

**Minutes of the Virginia Cave Board**  
**Saturday, January 9, 2010**  
**DCR Office, Richmond, Virginia**

DRAFT

**Virginia Cave Board Members Present**

Mr. Tom Lera, Chairman  
Ms. Babs Funkhouser  
Dr. John R. Holsinger  
Ms. Barbara L. Moss  
Ms. Judy Molnar  
Ms. Meredith Weberg  
Mr. David Socky  
Mr. Andrew Harrison  
Mr. Roger Kirchen, Virginia Department of Historic Resources

**Virginia Cave Board Members Not Present**

Mr. Jesse J. Richardson  
Dr. Dan Doctor  
Mr. Dave Culver

**DCR Staff Present**

Mr. Wil Orndorff  
Mr. Larry Smith  
Ms. Carol Zokaites  
Mr. Steve Roble  
Mr. Chris Hobson  
Mr. Tom Smith

**Others Present**

Mr. Joey Fagan  
Mr. Gary Moss

**Call to Order**

Mr. Tom Lera called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM and declared a quorum present.

**Introduction**

Mr. Lera welcomed members of the Virginia Cave Board, DCR staff, and guests. Mr. Lera also announced that Cave Board member Jesse Richardson will be resigning for personal reasons, effective upon receipt of his letter of resignation.

**Election of Secretary**

With the departure of VDCR staff member Joey Fagan, who served as the VCB secretary, Mr. Lera asked for nominations for VCB secretary.

MOTION: Ms. Moss nominated Ms. Funkhouser to serve as VCB secretary.

SECOND: Ms. Weberg seconded.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Lera asked Ms. Funkhouser if she accepted the nomination, to which she assented.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

### **Approval of Minutes from August 15, 2009 Meeting**

MOTION: Ms. Moss moved that the minutes from the VCB meeting of August 15, 2009, be accepted with the changes Ms. Molnar had circulated via email.

SECOND: Ms. Weberg seconded.

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

### **Treasury Report**

Mr. Larry Smith reported that at the time of this meeting, the Virginia Cave Board (VCB) Treasury contains a balance of \$1,100, which will roughly cover publishing one issue of the Virginia Cave Owners Newsletter, based on the current mailing list.

### **Old Business**

#### **Education and Outreach Committee Report**

Ms. Weberg presented the Education report:

#### **Newsletter**

For budgetary reasons, the committee considered publishing an e-newsletter in place of the current printed format, which also would require mailing a postcard announcing the change to the current mailing list. The group decided against the concept in favor of sending out a printed issue funded by grants. By partnering with The Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society, VCB can eliminate the bulky system of obtaining purchase orders by dealing with the printer directly.

Ms. Zokaites suggested printing a July issue containing a White Nose Syndrome update that notes WNS implications for landowners; she further suggested that we use an opt-out feature for printed copies, as the newsletter will also be available on the web page.

The mailing list will soon be greatly expanded as the GIS files update has resulted in a data base list of upwards of 4,400 caves, with some cave owners having multiple ownership. This list, which will be finalized by July, will greatly expand our mailing list.

Mr. Lera suggested that the VCB needs quotes for bulk rate mailing.

Ms. Weberg announced an article deadline of July 1, layout by July 15 and mailing before August 1.

#### **Cave Week**

Ms. Funkhouser will write a Cave Owners Newsletter article and a letter to Virginia grottos asking for volunteers to track Cave Week press releases and emphasizing website changes with updates provided by Mr. Socky. These solicited inputs should be sent to the Cave Week website.

The theme of the 2010 Cave Week is “What’s Killing Our Bats”, the centerpiece of which will be the poster developed by Ms. Zokaites. DCR will send out a press release.

### **Joint Technical Committee Report**

Mr. Socky presented the Joint Technical Committee report:

#### **Stormwater Regulations**

There have been many technical changes in the stormwater regulations handbook, which have been accepted with no feedback; their release date is unknown as state approvals are needed, a process that can be a five-year duration.

#### **Class 5 Injection Wells**

The state and the Environmental Protection Agency are not moving on this issue. The committee discussed the VCB role in activity and education efforts. The regulations need more enforcement, but are hampered by a lack of resources and the fact that the laws are not all encompassing. The same issues face regulations regarding sinkholes and groundwater pollution.

The committee recommends that the VCB sponsor meetings, seminars, and talks with appropriate agencies regarding laws applicable to this issue.

#### **Powell Mountain Karst Preserve Inventory**

The CCV website reports 400 species catalogued, great diversity for such a small area.

#### **Crystal Caverns Amphipod**

Dr. Holsinger reported that *Stygobromus hubbardi* might go on the Fish and Wildlife Service endangered list.

#### **White Nose Syndrome (WNS)**

The devastating disease has been discovered in six bats (2 little browns and 4 pipistrelles) in Tawney’s Cave, where the gate has been breached. As of this meeting date, WNS has not been found in Tennessee or in Kentucky caves; in fact, WNS has not extended beyond Hancock Cave. No new Virginia caves have reported an outbreak of WNS, but the disease has been found in France. WNS has not been found in the Gray Bat population. Underweight bats have picked up some bulk. All in all, the WNS outbreak is not as bad as had been expected this winter, but it is early in the season and could get worse before winter ends.

Soil samples of WNS-positive sites have been found to contain the WNS fungus. This is a promising research direction. Bats have been banded for study.

The Committee recommends a meeting between all interested organizations in late April. At such a meeting, divergent opinions as sure to be expressed, perhaps heatedly so, but the process will be worthwhile.

### **New Business**

#### **DCR Karst Program Report**

Wil Orndorff presented a report entitled “Outline of Virginia Natural Heritage Program Cave and Karst Protection Strategy”, reprinted here:

1. Cave and karst protection efforts within the Virginia Natural Heritage Program will continue under the Name “Virginia Cave and Karst Project.”

(The cuts of September 2009 eliminated the EPA funding for the Karst Groundwater Protection Program, which accounted for approximately two-thirds of Karst Program funding. Hence, two of the three full time staff positions were eliminated. The name change reflects the change in scale and focus of continued efforts.)

2. Cave and Karst Project dedicated staff consists of the “Karst Protection Coordinator”, who is currently Wil Orndorff.

3. Availability of funding will largely dictate the nature and extent of karst protection projects staff will work on. Funding is expected to be achieved through a combination of grants and contracts from karst conservation partners such as those listed in item number six below. Additional funding will be received through environmental project review and related follow-up consultations and site visits.

4. Existing staff within the Natural Heritage Program who will continue to support cave and karst protection efforts include members of various sections, including inventory (Chris Hobson, Anne Chazal, Steve Roble, and Chris Ludwig), project review (Rene Hypes), stewardship (Bryan Wender, Al Cire, Claiborne Woodall, and Bill Dingus), data management (Megan Rollins), and protection (Larry Smith and Irv Wilson).

5. DCR Education Coordinator Carol Zokaites within the DCR Director’s Office and the Karst Protection Coordinator will mutually support and promote Project Underground and other education and outreach efforts associated with cave and karst protection. Natural Heritage program staff will continue to seek funding to support cave and karst education efforts within the agency and in collaboration with state, federal, and private sector partners listed under item number 6 below.

6. The Karst Protection Coordinator will continue to work with a variety of state, federal, and private sector partners to both perform cave and karst protection tasks and seek grants and contracts to support specific cave and karst protection activities. These partners include but shall not be limited to

- The Virginia Cave Board
- The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
- The Virginia Outdoors Foundation
- The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality – Groundwater Program
- The Virginia Division of Mineral Resources
- The Virginia Department of Transportation
  
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service
- The US Geological Survey
- The US Forest Service
- The US Environmental Protection Agency
- The National Park Service
  
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Cave Conservancy of the Virginias
- The Virginia Speleological Survey
- The Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society

- Project Underground

### **DCR Karst Education Report**

Carol Zokaites presented a report entitled “Cave and Karst Education in Virginia, January 2010”, reprinted here:

The Karst Education Coordinator’s job title and duties have been changed to DCR Education Coordinator. This position has moved from the Natural Heritage Division to the DCR Director’s office. I will still be supporting the Project Underground education program for Virginia but only as part of my job duties. I will also be supporting other DCR programs and I will continue to work with the Environmental Education Network in Virginia.

One big problem for my position and cave and karst education is funding. My job will be covered by grants funds and right now there is only six months’ worth of funding, lasting until June 2010.

DCR Project Underground has become an important and well-regarded program for formal education (schools) and non-formal education (outreach programs, park interpretations, nature centers, etc.). The Project Underground program is supported by facilitators (workshop leaders) from many state agencies and organizations. This will not change.

Karst is a topic covered in the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) explicitly by name (“Karst topography”) and indirectly (groundwater, biology, and natural resource management). The need for cave and karst education will remain, and the Project Underground curriculum will be used for teaching activities and teachers’ professional development programs. The current WNS crisis has many teachers and non-formal educators interested in materials and information on bats and WNS.

It is important to remember the importance of education in cave and karst protection. People will only protect something they know about and understand. It is only educating the public that karst groundwater issues are addressed at the local levels. For example, gaining public support to address the issue of WNS will only happen if people understand the importance of the bats and the interactions of the species in the ecosystem.

There are many ways in which the Cave Board can help. The Karst Program staff members were often called on to give presentations on karst issues to formal and non-formal groups and to set up staff displays at many outreach events and field days. With the recent budget cuts, these types of activities will be hard for staff to cover. Board members and other caver volunteers could help with many of these activities, and I could set up some training sessions to provide materials and information. Another place for volunteer help is with professional development workshops. There will be a need for field trip leaders and presenters on various karst issues at training events around the state.

As the cave and karst education strategy develops, I will continue to work with the Karst Protection Coordinator and other staff in the Natural Heritage Program working on cave and karst projects. I am still the National Coordinator for the Project Underground program, which can also help support some Virginia cave education.

Karst education in Virginia will also continue to need the help and support of the caving community.

### **Joint Meeting on White Nose Syndrome**

Mr. Hobson observed that Tawney's Cave is the latest infected site. At present, WNS is found within caves in Smyth, Bath, Giles, Bland, and Rockingham Counties. Observation indicates that weights have looked good in most individual bats at the present time. However, observation of New England caves during the first year was also not too bad, but WNS went off the charts during the second year of the infection. The question is "How will WNS progress in this latitude?" We are in the data collection phase with gray bats, and are watching to see if WNS moves into Tennessee caves. Funding is not over-abundant (there was a State Wildlife Grant in the amount of \$20,000 and other sources are pending). An effective informational poster is linked to the Cave Week and VCB web sites.

Mr. Orndorff interjected a question "What happens to the coalition of interested agencies and caving organizations as more infected caves turn up and as the list of closed caves grows, and justification for their closure fades?"

The soil sample study has produced limited results as yet, and the partners will want to know what follows. For risk assessment, some data has not yet been published, so it is difficult to make policy decisions. We do not want to disturb distressed bat populations and/or spread WNS, so do we consider seasonal vs. annual cave closure, or close part of a cave? The Virginia Coalition policy deviated somewhat from policy established by Wildlife and Fisheries.

Mr. Lera suggested that VCB hold its next meeting after the sampling is finished as a joint policy meeting with interested parties at Grottoes Town Hall. Such a meeting will open discussion, if not result in decisions.

Mr. Orndorff suggested that the meeting keep to the current Virginia coalition, which includes the Cave Conservancy of Virginia, Virginia Speleological Society, Virginia Cave Board, Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society, and Butler Cave Conservancy. Ms. Zokaites added that we want the caving groups to attend. Mr. Lera suggested that we invite only Virginia groups, but open the meeting to the public at a public place. The meeting was set for May 15 at 10:00 AM at Grottoes Town Hall. The late spring date will allow for policy decisions regarding seasonal cave closures before caving activity picks up.

### **Commercial Cave Updates**

Ms. Molnar reported that Grand Caverns management has smoothly transitioned from the Upper Valley Regional Park Authority to the Town of Grottoes. Digging and mapping efforts have continued, and manager Lettie Stickley, and then several VCB members, asked for clarification of applicable archaeology regulations.

Roger Kirchen provided DHR's position on when a cave permit is necessary as regards archeological investigation. Excavation for the purposes of cave exploration should be permissible without a permit provided that (1) there is no willful intent to recover or disturb archaeological remains or prehistoric or historic features, and (2) all excavation ceases immediately if archaeological remains or prehistoric or historic features are encountered during the excavation. DCR/DHR should be notified of the discovery. Excavation should not resume until a permit from DCR with DHR comment is obtained and a qualified professional archaeologist is retained to inspect the discovery. Of course, if human remains are encountered, other sections of states code, including the Virginia Antiquities Act, must be satisfied.

Ms. Funkhouser reported that management of Crystal Caverns is in transition. Dr. Holsinger reminded the Board that a PDF copy of the Museum of Natural History journal article naming and describing the species of amphipod found in two Hupp's Hill caves is available, and that scientists are working to

protect the cave for the continued viability of the species. Mr. Lera recommended that VCB send a letter of support for the non-profit cave's education and preservation mission.

### **VCB Support Role for the DCR Natural Heritage Program Cave and Karst Protection Strategy**

Web site support will continue, but with DCR staff cuts, former support personnel will no longer be on call for many functions they once filled. Mr. Orndorff recommended that VCB enlarge its role in educational outreach at cave/karst events and continue working on stormwater regulations. Ms. Zokaites encouraged the board to open lines of communication with the DCR Director's office and remarked that the nation looks to Virginia as a leading example of karst education and preservation efforts, as Virginia possesses the only state Cave Board.

### **Letters of Appreciation**

MOTION: Mr. Socky moved that letters of appreciation be sent to Joey Fagan and Jesse Richardson for their exemplary service.

SECOND: Ms. Molnar seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

### **Public Comment Period and Announcements**

The next meeting of the Virginia Cave Board will be the Joint Meeting on White Nose Syndrome at the Grottoes Town Hall on May 15 at 10:00 AM.

### **Adjournment**

MOTION: Ms. Moss moved that the meeting adjourn.

SECOND: Ms. Weberg seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Lera adjourned the meeting at 3:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Thomas Lera  
Board Chairman

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Babs Funkhouser  
Secretary